

your kingdom as great
by liesmyth

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Alternatively titled: Dark Lady Hermione Fucks with Tom Riddle's Mind. That's it. That's the story.

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><p>They put him in a cell.<p>

As far as prisons went, his was nothing to sneer at – clean and dry, if dreadfully small, adequately lit by two yellow-orange globes glowing softly against the wall. There was no window, of course, and the air was stale but clean, just the tiniest hint of the bad smell so characteristic of forgotten places and airless closets, a smell that had been with him for a good part of his childhood.

It scared Tom how quickly he'd recognized it.

If hard pressed, he would perhaps have admitted that his living conditions for the foreseeable future were something of an improvement over some of the places he'd had to suffer through, and certainly a great deal better than the possible alternative. After all he had read about Azkaban, extensively; seen for himself the dungeons in the Malfoy Manor, damp and dirty and impossibly cold.

This room had a cot that looked almost like a bed, with a drab blanket thrown haphazardly on it – it was a washed-out brown and probably older than he was, but it looked warm enough. He even had a

bedside table, tall and sturdy and a complete eyesore, and Tom wondered if the thing had been put in his room out of carelessness or subtle mockery. In all his life he'd never had much in the way of material possessions and now, as a prisoner with only the clothes on his back, he could hardly afford to fill two drawers.

He lay down on the bed because there was nothing else to do, hands behind his head and eyes ahead of him, unblinkingly. Everything was carpeted, in the manner of Muggle motels — even the walls up to his head — all in brown, old and faded. The ceiling was a dirty white; the door, the only thing of notice in the entire room, had clearly just been put there, the metal almost shining. There were runic incantations carved all over it, and Tom doubted he would be able to break through it even if they'd left him his wand.

It was, to put it plainly, the dullest room Tom Riddle had ever seen.

He did it best to hate it. They should have at least had the good grace to throw him into a real prison, not this pathetic excuse for a cage, boring and confining and utterly maddening, some confusing cross between insult and privilege. He wondered if it had been done on purpose, to make him feel grateful he didn't have it worse — and he could feel it working, could hear that traitorous voice in his thoughts, whispering that perhaps he should count himself lucky.

Every time it started he stopped it resolutely, slammed down on that shameful part of his mind and filled it with memories of everything he should have had — all the things he almost had, how he came close enough to touch before it was taken from him. He hated that voice, an unwelcome reminder of the pitiful boy he had been, the person he didn't want to be ever again. It was supposed to be different, from now on.

They had promised he would live forever.

Earlier that morning, he'd been told he would be tried in front of the Wizengamot in a week's time; after that, likely put to death. He had brought it on himself, they told him. After all, he'd dared to take up arms against the Lady, sinned of wrath and envy and pride, rebelled and lost.

Now he was fallen.

Time in his cell wasâ€œ odd. At times it went by slowly, when he was lying on his bed trying to calm down, to fall asleep — and then suddenly he would be hit by the crushing realization that he would die soon, and that was when he fell on his knees in a panicked gasp, scratching at his throat and trying to breathe.

He didn't have a watch, of course, nor did he have any other way of keeping track of the passage of time. Food would appear on his table at irregular intervals, bread and vegetables and boiled eggs, sometimes even meat; everything had already been cut, and was served on a paper plate with a paper cup for him to drink from. He ate with his hands.

At times the food wouldn't magically appear — the door would open, as it'd done three times so far, and someone would walk him and bring

him a platter, watching him eat with a silent unnerving stare. The second time the person on the other side of the door had been a boy he had known in Hogwarts, a Ravenclaw Quidditch player two years above him. Tom didn't try to engage in conversation â€“ he suspected he wouldn't get far and, besides, he didn't want anyone else to remind him that he was supposed to die.

He got a basin full of water â€“ warm water, even â€“ and some soap to wash himself with, and it would disappear and reappear again at the strangest times. He got a bucket to piss in, and he'd never felt more debased as he did when he started to feel glad that the thing was actually there. The basin was stone, dark and heavy, for the same reason that he had a bucket made of wood instead of a chamber pot he could throw to the floor and collect splinters from. It would not do for Tom Riddle to kill himself before the Lady had decreed that such was her will â€“ or, more realistically, he was not allowed anything that could be made into a weapon. It seemed sensible. He hated it.

The lights on the wall never went out. They glowed a soft orange that made his eyes water and his head ache, be it day or night, and soon it became impossible to tell if he'd been imprisoned two days, or six, or a lifetime. He was tired, he was weak, he slept a lot and stared at the ceiling and imagined how his blood would look splattered against the paint.

One day, whenever that was, he woke up to a woman sitting calmly in the middle of the room, holding a book on her lap and watching him through long dark lashes.

"Well," she said, when she noticed him gaping. "This is disappointing."

It was as though a jolt of lighting had passed through his body; he sat up straight, heartbeat racing in his throat. "It's you."

She closed her book and tilted her head, licking her lips as she spoke. "Indeed," she said. "I have to admit, I expected better from Slytherin House's best and brightest. As I said. Disappointing."

But Tom had been stared down worse than that by Rodolphus Lestrange and thrived because of it, and certainly he wasn't going to forget himself now of all times. He was dead anyways, he reminded himself, willing his hand to stop shaking. He could say whatever he wanted.

"In retrospect," he admitted. "That wasn't the smartest observation I could have made there. I must apologize. I was rather drowsy."

The Lady smiled, giving him a long slow nod. "That's better," she acknowledged. "Now, we've never been formally introduced, I am afraid. You are Tom Riddle." It wasn't a question. "Abraxas's pet half-blood."

"You seem to have it all figured out," Tom said, because he'd long ago learned that it was better to say something and state the obvious than to not speak at all and look weak.

"I do." She smiled again. Her teeth were very white, her eyes shimmering. "The Malfoys aren't dead," her tongue darted out of her

mouth to trail along her upper lip. "Yet."

That surprised him. As soon as he'd opened her eyes and saw her sitting mere feet away from him, the loathed and despised centre of stories and nightmares, the self-styled Lady he'd been taught to think of as 'that mudblood woman', the one he'd been groomed to fight and defeat and utterly destroy as soon as he saw her, tranquil and smiling, he thought she'd come to gloat. She was notorious for it, it was said; as ruthless and spiteful as she was cunning.

"And what about me?" Tom asked, because the Malfoys had given him a life and a place when he'd had none, but he did not wantâ€" could notâ€" "Why am I not dead yet?"

"Oh, well," she made an airy sort of gesture with her right hand, left still holding that book. "It depends."

It was a bait, dangling mere inches from his face. Like a pet being handed a treat, teased with it. Just a game.

He felt a surge of anger towards this woman â€" that mudblood woman â€" who'd wrecked and burned his entire life, and was now dancing joyously on the ashes. "On what?" he asked.

She stood up, smoothing the creases from her blouse, and made her chair disappear with a snap of her fingers. "On how well you'll do," she said. "I am told you are very smart."

Tom shrugged. He'd never been much for modesty, false or not. "That is true."

She laughed â€" actually laughed, a high thrilling sound with her head thrown back and her eyes closed. "My, Tom." She walked up to him, uncomfortably close. Her tights brushed against the flimsy mattress of his bed and she brought a hand forward, fingers curling to trace his cheekbone. He closed his eyes, forcing himself to stay still. Her touch was surprisingly light, unlike any others he'd ever received. In the darkness, it was almost pleasant.

"You're going to be a real delight." He felt her touch his cheek, cool and feather-light, then his chin. Her thumb pressed against the underside of his jaw. "I can tell."

And then she was gone, and he felt a burst of wind against his skin and opened his eyes to an empty room; and after he'd fallen asleep and woken up all over again, he thought that maybe it had been all a dream.

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><p>AN: You guys, I'm SO nervous about this story. It has been getting metaphorical dust in my draft folder for the past three months, until I could barely stand to look at it anymore so here you have it. BTW, the reason for this A/N is because I'm feeling extremely insecure about this story and would love to get some input on it, but I don't have a beta. If anyone's up for talking Tomione to me, PLEASE; I'll love you forever. **

End

file.